



INCLUSION AND GESTALT PEDAGOGY – GESTALT ORIENTED COUNSELLING OF MULTI-PROFESSIONAL TEAMS

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ABSTRACT

Last year, the 'Gestaltpädagogische Vereinigung (GPV)' oriented its 6th European Conference under the working title 'Learning in diversity - together, individually, inclusively' in Hannover (Germany). At the same time, among other things, within the scope of the conference, it was possible to discuss Gestalt pedagogy on the basis of Annedore Prengel's lecture 'Inclusive pedagogy and personally meaningful learning' as a possible approach, which places the individual at the centre of things and with it, incorporates aspects which, in our view, embody what makes the inclusive pedagogy of diversity necessary: attentiveness to the fit between the individual and the system, dealing with heterogeneity, recognition and respect in terms of sustainability and life experience. In so doing, heterogeneity represents the task and condition of Gestalt pedagogical studies in the 21st century (cf. Bürmann 2015 31 et seq.; for this, cf. Kienzl 2015 103 et seq.).

KEYWORDS: Gestalt pedagogy, Gestalt oriented counselling, multi-professional teams, inclusion, humanistic pedagogy.

Inclusion is a far-reaching socio-political issue that will occupy us in the coming decades in terms of very different client groups and specific challenges (e.g. with a view to questions in the context of disability, age and migration). In Gestalt pedagogical conceptions, we see particular potential for pedagogy between welfare and autonomy. At the same time, in the basics, pedagogical studies have a differentiated tool for the responsible systematic exploration of phenomena to do with the experience of 'otherness' and/or 'foreignness'. In the field of inclusion, it is usually multi-professional teams working together, who are faced with the task of supporting and accompanying heterogeneous groups in a pedagogical setting. Therefore our contribution tries to initiate invigorating impulses for Gestalt pedagogical supervision in inclusive fields of action. The timeliness of humanistic pedagogy and/or Gestalt pedagogy for designing teaching and learning processes, personal development and with reference to phenomenology, which is given a special place in our approach, should not be denied (cf. Bürmann 2015, 28-30).

From the Inclusion discourses (of which the media, the research literature, as well as the clients who come to me in supervision or the colleagues with whom I am exchange via the University of Wuerzburg), we are aware of a precarious situation which relates to the implementation of inclusion processes. On one hand, special needs, especially concerning emotional and social development seem to increase and on the other hand, the potentially available material resources and political decisions are slow in coming. For many people, the complexity of the inclusion discourse and sometimes an unrealistic claim for inclusion to leads to an overload and excessive demands.

In the field of supervision, research, teaching and lesson planning, Gestalt workers make a contribution despite challenging conditions as a result of their attitude to awareness formation. By teaming up with multi-professional teams, inclusion and transitional processes can be professionally accompanied, initiated and implemented to the advantage of all stakeholders (cf. Cameron 2014, 49 et seq.). However, cooperation in multi-professional teams always represents a potential for conflict and with it challenges that are often borne by the client and as such often have more of an exclusionary effect than a including effect. Multi-professional teams are to be understood as a heterogeneous group which, in the process of inclusion – i.e. in transition – also require support in terms of special counselling or supervision by an external third party.

Gestalt pedagogy (e.g. Burow 1988, Bürmann 1992, Stein 2005) is derived from the Gestalt psychotherapy founded by Perls & Perls, Goodman and Hefferline, and uses different principles inherent in Gestalt psychotherapy.

Today, supervision is a special form of counselling propagated as a 'life accompanying science' (Huschke-Rhein 2003, 23) which, in pedagogical fields of action, can be of particular importance (see Stein 2005, 122). Educators perceive a proposal for supervision if for example, there are conflicts or other problems within the context of work and in local contact with clients which are emotionally draining or more require clarity. Gestalt-based supervision can accompany learning and support (cf. Bick 2011 169). The shape of this learning is not only a lifelong and more social accompanying life, but primarily a holistic process.

Within Gestalt pedagogy supervision takes place as a special form of consultancy (cf. Stein 2005, 123). If this takes place in inclusive pedagogical fields of action,

multi-professional teams can benefit from Gestalt principles as inspiration for a reflective practice in two ways - in terms of structural systematisation and content systematisation.

1. On the one hand, the principles of support Gestalt studies can support the supervision context, the arrangement of the setting, steering related the type of decision-making, the coordination and weighting of the content and the conversation mode.
2. On the other hand, principles-guided reflection enables a flexible and multi-perspective discussion of highly complex pedagogical issues facing multi-professional teams, without oversimplifying them. In this context, the Gestalt approach maintains a clear position with regard to the dimensions of ethics and attitude. Based on Kobi, in the view of humanist pedagogy we see that from our thinking, feeling and acting, our attitude is coloured from an upstream position (cf. Kobi 2004, 73).

Particularly with regard to 'personally meaningful learning', the Gestalt pedagogical consulting approach provides a whole range of educational repertoire involving skills and quality criteria for the professional, pedagogical areas of study that are based on social science concepts. According to Bürmann, it are especially learning situations, where an attempt is made to implement past experiences (e.g. experiences from supervision) in everyday business or everyday private life (cf. Bürmann 1992, 11). Especially for Bürmann, Gestalt principles and techniques represent a 'path to a more complex encounter with the unknown' against the background of the Gestalt attitude and Gestalt method (Bürmann 2015, 38).

For special needs diagnosis and intervention, the things that take place in the intersubjective space between people form the main focal point of Gestalt pedagogical interest. Hence, Gestalt pedagogy has numerous analysis procedures / change procedures that are used as an approach within this space. In addition, it provides a vocabulary for describing, as well as concepts for reflecting on and interpreting the phenomena that are located there.

"Such learning [...] that is experienced with enthusiasm and emotional involvement within the situation itself – observable from the outside as lively activity or concentrated mindful involvement – and this is evaluated by the individual over situationally as an important learning experience, is something I call >> personally meaningful learning <<" (Bürmann 1992, 11).

From my point of view, this is a key characteristic as well as formative educational processes for teaching and learning principles.

Certainly, one can also say that Jörg Bürmann's approach has also anticipated certain aspects of postmodernism through its localising of personality forming visual learning experiences as process-cyclic sequences, e.g. considering communication and interaction as intersubjective reciprocal processes that can be divided into a "hermeneutic understanding of meaning" (cf. Bürmann 1992, 12). Ilse Bürmann also calls for a projective "formative teaching and learning" approach and for 'the dualism of the person and the material thing to be overcome' (Bürmann 1997).

As such, one can understand “personally meaningful learning” as a key concept or a Gestalt principle for academic and extracurricular Gestalt pedagogy, which is also practically applied in counselling situations based on Gestalt pedagogy (especially in the field of decision making).

Such a promotion of social and emotional skills through Gestalt-based pedagogical counselling in the form of supervision should be understood as a process of self-reflection and the hermeneutic approach which considers the cognitive, emotional and physical level in the here-and-now (vgl. Burow & Scherpp 1981, 64). Firstly, pedagogical goals that can be achieved in Gestalt counselling promote a trusting and comfortable learning climate and secondly the acceptance of the relationship of the counselled to himself, to the counsellor and to others (cf. Bürmann 1993, 99).

Central to the presence of the supervisor, ultimately enabling them to become learning models for supervisees, is the importance when the supervisees have really assimilated the intense emotional experiences and learning processes which have been 'formed' and learn from them (cf. Nevis 2005 99). Then an emotional process of change takes place in supervision events which the Gestalt psychotherapist Bock summarises in the following sentence: “What is, what is allowed, and what may be, can change” (Staemmler 2009, 2). Concerning the effects of different supervisor attitudes, studies made by Yalom, Lieberman and Miles have shown that clients were able to complete a learning experience, in so far as they found it personally significant for them (cf. Yalom, Lieberman & Miles 1973 for this cf. Nevis 2005, 99).

Since the 70s, the integrative form of counselling has developed from 'integrative Gestalt therapy' founded by Petzold (cf. Rechten 1998, 97; Gröning 2006, 11). For Stein, Gestalt pedagogical counselling relates to “individually oriented counselling that starts in a strong way, in the client's inner life” (Stein 2005, 115). With Petzold, one can say that this takes place through the cooperation of multi-professional teams which take effect in inclusive pedagogical fields of action, something which he understands as a 'polylogical' process (cf. Petzold 2004, 54 et seq.).

As such, the Gestalt approach provides countless stimuli for the content-based and structural foundation of consulting processes. Our consulting approach is humanistically interactionist/synergist with a 'life-system orientation' (Stein 2005, 13). For us, the central factor is the idea of the reflected interaction of multi-professional teams and the synopsis of technical and content-related aspects (cf. Burow 1988 106 et seq.).

For us, the following are important **Gestalt principles**

- **The principle of the here and now:** Where possible, a differentiated examination of counselling conditions relevant to the present and situational characteristics (cf. Burow 1988, 99 et seq.). The here-and-now is the time and place of analysis and change, taking account the past and potentially future things (cf. Stein 2005, 37).
- **The principle of completed Gestalt:** The assumption that people aspire to accomplish a task they have started (Gestalt). An attempt is made to give 'satisfactory possibilities for completing tasks' and 'to create situations in which the accumulation of uncompleted Gestalt is avoided' (Burow 1988, 106 et seq.; for this, cf. the TZI posit that 'disturbances prevail!' Cohn 1975).
- **The principle of responsibility:** Getting to know some behaviour options positively using personal behavioural scope (cf. Burow 1988, 101 et seq., for this cf. Stein 2005, 44, 47). For us, the principle of responsibility is an element for testing the sustainability of inclusive pedagogical ideas and activities.
- **Principle of life-friendliness:** As a reflection principle for the assessment and alignment of attitude and interventions. Through this principle, it is the individual which is most strongly considered (this is particularly important in the context of special needs) with reference to systemic issues, especially with regard to the reflection of feasibility and sustainability concerning measures to be initiated.

Finally it can be said that pedagogical Gestalt counselling also requires reference to 'dialogic learning', something which cannot be done in this paper (for this, cf. Flecha & Soler 2013, 453-458; Racionero & Padrós 2010, 151 et seq.). Moreover, of cardinal relevance, it is my view that Gestalt pedagogy should be examined with regard to concepts of transformative and transformational learning and educational processes, and/or evidence should be developed concerning the extent to which Gestalt pedagogy supports change processes in the process of learning and training and can accompany professional transitions (for this, cf. Mezirow 1997; Cranton & King 2003; Taylor 1998; Koller 2012). Working out the potentials and limits of process-based theoretical Gestalt psychotherapy and process-oriented Gestalt psychotherapy for pedagogical Gestalt studies, Gestalt counselling and case supervision is a research task in the dissertation of Matthias-T. Kraus (cf. Staemmler & Bock 2007).

My contribution should be seen as a short insight into an innovative field. Research into this subject takes place at different levels, for example, at the

Department of Special Education V – Education for People with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (University of Würzburg) and at the Hekation-Institute for Gestalt-oriented counselling, supervision and research (Würzburg).

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